

May 6, 2016

Narrative of Events – Skagway, Alaska

By: Robert Vuille, Lead Mechanic – Juneau, Alaska

TEMSCO Pilot Chris Maggio was scheduled to carry out the mission for completion of flying dogs to the Denver glacier (Alaska Icefield Expeditions Camp). Weather conditions delayed the scheduled start up time around 8AM. Around 9AM, the TEMSCO company employee orientation was presented. Chris was in attendance along with all employees, including myself.

Between 13:00 – 15:30, Chris presented a new employee indoctrination to the AS350 B2 helicopter about handling and safety awareness of the aircraft as part of the TOPS program (Tour Operator's Program of Safety) that TEMSCO is active in. It was held inside our TEMSCO hangar located on the airport in Skagway. I was in the hangar at the time doing paperwork and as usual Chris gave a very thorough training course into the aircraft.

Around 17:00 weather permitted flights to commence so Chris departed for his first of seven flights. The scheduled flights were to complete the task of putting dogs on the glacier for AIE (Alaska Icefield Expeditions). I observed the operations of two or three flights from upstairs in Chris' office space with Joel Kain (TEMSCO Helicopters – Director of Safety Officer).

Joel and I relocated to the dispatch area downstairs, where Skagway TEMSCO base manager Kelly Healy was overseeing the operations. Sometime thereafter, Joel was reviewing the ERP (Emergency Response Plan) and brought up the subject of forced landing opposed to precautionary landing and a brief discussion ensued between us.

On a return flight to base from dog camp, I overheard Chris report in on possible icing conditions on his windscreen and windy conditions – Kelly and Chris conversed. Kelly then decided to forego an external sling load that was planned with a different aircraft. He decided to just take an essential supply load internally instead.

Chris had just returned to base and departed. I then dispatched as Kelly went to load his aircraft (N970TH) internally with help from the AIE ground crew. As I dispatched during that time, I recall no radio communication between AIE on the Denver glacier and no communication to Skagway TEMSCO base from N94TH (Chris' aircraft).

Shortly thereafter, Kelly returned to dispatch after loading N970TH. He asked me if I received any communication from Chris or dog camp. I replied, "Not a peep" (I believe were my words). Kelly then dispatched and made radio calls to Chris with no reply. Kelly noticed on the flight tracker at/or around 19:00 that the last recorded position of Chris was north of dog camp. Kelly had dog camp radio Chris, but no reply. Kelly got information from dog camp that Chris had landed and took off. Kelly continued to radio call Chris, still with no reply. He then told me to go tell AIE Skagway base to offload his aircraft as preparation for an overdue aircraft.

Lead pilot Jesse Dominick arrived at TEMSCO base. Kelly put him in operations control/radio calls and Kelly had Joel Kain dispatch and put into effect the ERP for an overdue aircraft. Kelly asked if I would go with him to search for Chris. I said, "Yes."

Around 19:15, Kelly had departed in N970TH, with me onboard, to help look for Chris. Enroute, Jesse radioed Kelly the last known GPS coordinates of N94TH. Kelly entered them into our aircraft. Kelly talked to dog camp as we were in view of them. They said conditions had improved since Chris was here. Kelly flew more on Chris' path until weather conditions determined and Kelly's decision we went back out the way we came in and flew north towards Reid Creek in that valley. Kelly flew around trying to get up over the ridgeline, but with visibility and current weather conditions, he quickly determined to try another route while always making radio calls for Chris and communicating with the TEMSCO base.

Kelly flew to the East Fork Valley, where he worked hard and smart to try and reach and locate Chris, probably 20 minutes. The sun was starting to help a little. Kelly elected to go back to Reid Creek and eventually worked up and over the ridgeline. Kelly spotted the aircraft below us at about 4,000 feet. He reported to base that the aircraft had been located and it was catastrophic.

It was hard to tell because of weather conditions at times, but I could see no footprints or movement in the vicinity. It was very difficult to tell what side the aircraft was on. Tail boom was off and right angled to the fuselage/canopy. The emergency float was deployed uphill. Kelly called dog camp to see if they could snowmobile over to the north and possibly get to Chris that way if the route was safe enough to navigate.

Kelly had base contact the fire department search team and had them on standby. Kelly stayed on site and we hoped that he could get me on the ground, but weather conditions determined if he would be able to or not.

We returned to base for more fuel. Kelly and I launched back to site hoping to put our feet on the ground. The coast guard was in route and Kelly and I flew over the site observing the area. Base had Kelly return to the waterfront to pick up the Skagway search team.

As we landed at base, Kelly idled, and I helped load gear into the aircraft (N970TH). Kelly and four search and rescue people departed for drop off at dog camp. Kelly landed at dog camp. The passengers and gear were offloaded and he returned to base and shut down for the day. Kelly or Jesse asked me to put two aircraft in the hangar as the Coast Guard could need fuel.

These are the events to the best of my knowledge,
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